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*LUTHER'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ONLY*

PRESERVED SMITH

AMHERST, MASS.

One of the best-known stories about Luther relates that while at Rome in December, 1510, he began climbing on his knees, for the indulgence to be thus acquired, the Scala Santa, but that, before he reached the top he remembered the text, "The just shall live by faith," and he desisted. If authentic, this anecdote proves that he had thus early attained to the fundamental doctrine of the Reformation. The source of the story is a reminiscence of Luther's son Paul, who says that he heard it from his father when he was eleven years old but did not write it down until thirty-eight years later. Such testimony to any fact is necessarily unreliable at least in details, and now that the same story has been found, in a very different form, in one of Luther's own sermons, Paul's version of it must be abandoned. In 1545 the Reformer relates that, while at Rome, he ascended the Holy Stairs with the purpose of getting the soul of an ancestor out of purgatory, but that when he arrived at the top he thought, "Who knows whether this prayer avails?" As this is assuredly no proof that he had by this time arrived at the *sola fides*, the only decisive reason for placing his acquisition of that doctrine prior to 1510 disappears, and we are thrown back on the earlier, contemporary sources, which in any case are more trustworthy, to trace the gradual development of that important dogma in his mind.

The road he travelled towards his ultimate goal was that of the contemporary scholastic theology. The old controversy between realists and nominalists, one of the deepest that has ever agitated human thought, and one which shows vitality in certain quarters even today, had given place, with the victory of the latter party, to a new alignment, of the "ancient" *versus* the "modern" school; the former supporting Albertus, Thomas, and Scotus, the latter Biel and Occam. The substance of the controversy was no longer, properly speaking, speculative but rather

literary, a hair-splitting and sophistical wrangling over the propriety of terms and even of syntax. "The flippancy and unreality of the later schoolmen were sins unto death which brought the inevitable penalty of the overthrow of scholasticism itself."¹ A little later Luther joined the humanists in decrying these "hog-doctors," but at first he drank deeply of their teaching, and, much as he revolted from them, the disciples of Occam left lasting marks on his mind. This master gave him his first taste of any kind of philosophy. At times he felt such pleasure in speculations on obscure points, such as that of Christ's divinity, that he seemed to be "among choirs of angels," but a sharp reaction always told him that he was rather "among devils." Again, rumination on the mysteries of predestination led him to so black a pit of horror and despair that ten years later he could hardly bear to speak of it. Even these thoughts seem to have had the morbid coloring of the young monk's neurotic diathesis.^{1a} It is no longer fashionable to extol Luther as the apostle of free thought. In his own early experiences was founded his horror of the purely human reason as an arbiter of divine matters; as such, it was for him the *omni studio fugienda sapientia carnis*.

He was most interested, however, not in points of abstract divinity, but in what the doctors had to say on the concrete and vital question, What shall I do to be saved? The answer given was precisely the opposite of that which he later attained for himself. The theologians he studied told him that a man must win redemption by his own works. Brother Martin was in the main perfectly right when he asserted that the doctors believed that God would infallibly give grace to one who did the best that was in him. It is true that the almost miraculous learning of Father Denifle² can quote more than two hundred mediaeval

¹ Workman: *Christian Thought to the Reformation*, 1911, 242 f. A good example of this is Eck's statement at the Leipsic debate that a good work was due to God "totum" but not "totaliter." O. Seitz: *Der authentische Text der Leipziger Disputation*, 54.

^{1a} This statement, and several others in the present study, will be elucidated by reference to my essay on "Luther's Development in the Light of Psycho-analysis" in *The American Journal of Psychology*, 1913, xxiv, pp. 360-377.

² H. P. Denifle: *Luther und Lutherthum. Ergänzungsband. Die abendländische Schriftausleger bis Luther über Justitia Dei*. 1905.

theologians, all of whom, save one, Abelard, certainly not known to Luther, interpreted the famous verse, Romans i. 17, "The just shall live by faith," much as did the Reformer. It is true that Father Grisar³ can cite some of Luther's immediate predecessors, Biel and Proles, for example, as witnesses that the importance of faith was never entirely lost sight of. But against the theory of the Church, holding a delicate balance between faith and works, must be put her practice, and, in this case as in others, actions spoke louder than words. It is an undeniable, an obtrusive fact that, whatever was the doctrine of the Church, at this time her practice had reduced the economy of individual redemption to an almost purely mechanical process of debit and credit for evil and good works. Dr. A. V. Müller⁴ has collected a large number of quotations from thirty-seven manuscript prayer-books in circulation between 1450 and 1550, all of them assuredly promising to the worshipper who would repeat such and such prayers or do certain pious acts, sundry temporal or spiritual blessings, the latter including indulgence and salvation. But the main proof of the thesis is found in facts so widely known as to need no verification by specific quotation from sources. The whole system of indulgences, for example, offered not only immunity from the pains of purgatory but all other spiritual favors, including forgiveness of sins⁵ and the grace of God, in return for the performance of a good work or the payment of money.⁶ The monastic system also encouraged men to believe that celibacy, fasting, privation and self-torture of all kinds, together with the appointed offices, were meritorious and practically certain to win salvation. Luther so believed, and acted on the belief in the best faith, hoping "to get to heaven by his monkery." Indeed, by these means he won the reputation of a saint, without attaining the least inward satisfaction or peace. In after-life he

³ H. Grisar: *Luther*, ii, 470.

⁴ A. V. Müller: *Luthers theologische Quellen*, 1912, 235 ff.

⁵ Though contrary to the now accepted theory of the Church, indulgences were often represented as forgiving "culpa" as well as "poena." So the indulgence at Einsiedel quoted by S. M. Jackson: *Zwingli*, 99.

⁶ See the sources published in B. J. Kidd: *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, nos. 1-10.

often stated the theory on which he acted while a monk, as for example: "They lead people from Christ to their own works, telling them to go into a cloister, or make a pilgrimage to Rome or Compostella, and live a severe, hard life, and choose the Virgin Mary or some saint as intercessor, that you may be saved."⁷ And this theory, which he was afterwards so passionately to combat, was deduced correctly and logically from the general practice of the Church. Not that he was repelled by the duties and privations of the monastic career as such; rather his letters and other references to his daily life show that he found in it the joy of work well done. What he did *not* find was salvation.⁸

His extant writings for the years preceding 1513 are very scant, being confined to three letters, a receipt, and some marginal notes to works of Lombard and Augustine, but they are sufficient to show that he was still at the antipodes of his final conclusions—the bondage of the will, salvation by faith, and certainty of election. From notes to Augustine of 1509 it is clear that Brother Martin still held to the freedom of the will; from others of about the same time, to Lombard, we infer that, though even at this early date he had begun to consider the problem, he was yet far from the *sola fides*.

He was led to reverse his position by a variety of influences, partly practical, partly academic. One of these was a long and rather heated quarrel with that faction of the Order which laid most stress on the punctilio of the cloister. The German Augustinians were divided into two parties; the "Observants," of a stricter rule imposed by their Vicar Proles in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and the "Conventuals," who had refused to adopt this reform. When John von Staupitz became Vicar of the German Province in 1503, he did his best to reunite the two congregations, and after long effort finally obtained a bull granting him the necessary power, the document being dated June 26, 1510, and published by him on the following September 30 at Wittenberg. This aroused a protest from the Observants them-

⁷ Werke, Weimar, xlvii, 8.

⁸ Luther's teacher, Dr. Usingen, testifies that in 1511 Luther was satisfied with his profession. Paulus: Usingen, 17. Other passages in his letters and in the Commentary on Romans show that this was true in 1515 and 1516. Römerbrief, Scholien, 318.

selves, the reason thereof being inferentially their unwillingness to have anything to do with the brothers whose practice was looser than their own. In October, 1510, two of the chapters, Nuremberg and Erfurt, sent an embassy to Rome to appeal from the action of their Vicar, the representative of Erfurt being Martin Luther.⁹ The mission came to nothing, probably because while at Rome Luther became convinced that Staupitz was in the right, and therefore went over to his side. His action was naturally resented at Erfurt, which within a few months became too hot to hold him and his friend Lang, who also sided with Staupitz, and both of them were consequently transferred, in the summer of 1511,¹⁰ to Wittenberg. This did not help matters, for Erfurt was jealous of the growth, largely at her expense, of the new university. The controversy was blown up afresh at a general chapter held at Cologne in May, 1512, at which Luther was present and at which Staupitz endeavored to carry out his plans for union. The Erfurters, indeed, were so incensed against their former brother that their leader, Dr. Nathin, represented his departure as a breach of faith and of oath to his *alma mater*; for at that time, when degrees were little more than licenses to teach, a man was required to lecture, for a time at least, at the academy at which he had prepared.¹¹ All this opposition came from men so

⁹ The date of the journey to Rome is given as one year later in Köstlin-Kawerau: Martin Luther (1903), i, 89, and this is followed by McGiffert: Martin Luther, 37 ff. and by W. Köhler: s.v. "Luther" in Scheel's Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. But Professor Kawerau has now become convinced of the greater probability of the earlier date (Lutherkalender, 1910) which is also given in Grisar: Luther, i, 21 ff., and in my Life and Letters of Martin Luther, 16. Its correctness is now settled by the recent discovery of a note of the Vicar General, Aegidius of Viterbo, dated January, 1511. Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, xxxii, 604.

¹⁰ In August, 1511, Lang matriculated at Wittenberg. Paulus: Usingen, 16. That Luther's transfer took place at about the same time may be inferred partly from this, partly from the fact that he lectured three semesters at Erfurt, beginning November, 1509.

¹¹ Kampschulte: Die Universität Erfurt, ii, 8, note 1, says that according to the custom of the time Luther should have continued lecturing at Erfurt. The degrees he took there were "baccalaureus ad biblia" and "sententiarius"; the doctorate at Wittenberg, October, 1512, was another grievance. An oath to lecture at the university where a man had taken his degree, or had prepared for it, was administered at Paris until 1452. H. Rashdall: Universities of Europe, i, 455 f. See further, my translation of Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters, 1913, pp. 30 f.

strictly Observant that they abhorred fellowship with those living under a looser rule. They appeared to Luther like Pharisees straining at gnats. His anger against these "little saints," as he called them, found vent in a rousing sermon, almost a tirade, delivered at the general chapter held at Gotha, May, 1515, when he was elected District Vicar. Some hostility to him was also found at Wittenberg, for his lectures contain occasional sarcasms against those "Judaizers" who trusted in their Order, their saints, and their ceremonies. The controversy necessarily increased his sense of the futility of the works practised by men with so little inward rectitude.

His reading supplemented this impression. From the first days in the cloister he had heard Augustine read, and in 1508 he had acquired and annotated some of his works. This profoundest of all Christian philosophers had won from Paul, *via* the Neo-Platonists and Victorinus, the doctrine of justification by faith, which, as a living conviction, he had made his own, holding it in neither exactly the Pauline nor in exactly the Lutheran sense. From the Bishop of Hippo the Wittenberg student received a higher conception of God than he had hitherto held, for the essence of St. Augustine's genius is his feeling that God was the be-all and end-all of his life. From him, too, came the doctrine of the depravity of the human will, and a new realization of the nature of sin and of grace. What Luther did not and could not get from his master was the answer to what was for him the kernel of the whole problem; for, "with all his horror of sin, St. Augustine had not experienced the horror of uncertainty of salvation,"¹² and, though he held the election to grace irresistible, he thought that no one could be sure of possessing that grace.

Augustine's most valuable element, his doctrine of grace and faith, was practically suppressed until the Sixteenth Century, but at that time there were several authors who began to take it up before Luther. Of these one certainly influenced him, the brilliant French humanist, Lefèvre d'Étaples, whose editions of the Psalms and of the Pauline Epistles Luther used in his university lectures. His copy, with notes in his own hand, of the Frenchman's *Quintuplex Psalterium* has survived, and the more

¹² Harnack: *History of Dogma* (English), v, 210, note.

closely it is studied the more nearly does the Saxon professor seem to have adopted his forerunner's doctrine. From this, for example, he borrowed his extremely complex method of interpreting Scripture in several senses, half of them literal and half of them spiritual. But he was far more deeply impressed by Lefèvre's *S. Pauli Epistolae XIV*, published in 1512. Luther did not get it until two or three years later, when it became the basis of his lectures on Romans. From it he obtained what linguistic material he used, until in March, 1516, the Greek New Testament of Erasmus appeared, when for the moment he deserted the older for the more recent authority. But the ascendancy of the Dutch humanist was short-lived. A year later Luther stated that the more he read him the less he liked him, "because I fear he does not sufficiently promote the cause of Christ and the grace of God, in which he is much more ignorant than Lefèvre." The French scholar, indeed, was peculiarly congenial to him, anticipating several of his later doctrines, including that of the supreme authority of the Bible. Justification by faith only was also pointed out by him in the clearest terms. There are two ways of righteousness, "that of the law and that of faith, the one of works, the other of grace, the one human, the other divine."¹³ Again: "It is almost profane to talk of the merit of works, especially before God. For a merit does not seem to ask for grace but to exact what is due; to attribute merit to works is to have the opinion of those who think that we can be justified by works, an error for which the Jews were particularly condemned. Therefore let us not speak of the merit of our works, which is little or none, but let us celebrate the grace of God, which is everything."¹⁴ This doctrine was most clearly expressed in the *Commentary on Romans*, the Epistle on which Luther, too, first lectured: "Do you ask whether there was ever anyone justified without the works of the law, written or natural? There have been such, even very many. Who knows not that the penitent thief was justified by faith

¹³ Romans iii, *S. Pauli Epistolae*, fol. 74, quoted by A. Humbert: *Les origines de la théologie moderne*, 283.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. viii, fol. 118b, quoted by E. Doumergue: *Jean Calvin*, 1899, i, 82.

only?"¹⁵ Finally: "By works without faith it is impossible to be justified; on the contrary, by faith without works it is possible."¹⁶

Such passages make it certain that Luther took his most famous doctrine bodily from Lefèvre. By "doctrine" I mean here the formula into which his theology was cast, for it must be noted and emphasized that it was but the form that was Lefèvre's; the personal experience which led the German friar to adopt this dogma and which gave it a new and deepened meaning were his own. On this more will be said presently; but the fact must here be underscored that what was borrowed from the Frenchman was but a marvellously apt formula to express the essence of a personal experience which the Reformer would have had in any case.

The formula indeed was so far from original with Luther that other men in his circle were grasping at the same thought. Stau-pitz and Carlstadt, for example, were not far from the *sola fides*, even before it was established by their greater friend. The essence of the thought is one of the oldest in Christianity, so that it is not hard to assert and to prove that in this respect Luther "was not an innovator but a renovator," that "all the opinions objected to by Denifle as specifically Lutheran were no intellectual discovery of the Reformer, but were known long before Luther, and found, during his life-time, both in and out of his Order, Catholic defenders."¹⁷ Are ideas, indeed, ever originated or invented by great men? Do they not rather arise by a necessary evolution in the minds of a generation, being thought about, hinted at, half enunciated by many, until some one of masterful insight focusses the scattered rays and thus founds a new school of thought?

Luther's second call to Wittenberg in 1511, which gave so much offence to his brethren, was for the purpose of enabling him to take the chair of Biblical exegesis, hitherto occupied by Stau-pitz. He therefore took the degree of "doctor of the Holy Script-

¹⁵ Romans iv, *ibid.* fol. 77a, quoted *ibid.* 83.

¹⁶ Romans iii, *ibid.* fol. 75a, quoted *ibid.*

¹⁷ A. V. Müller: *Luthers theologische Quellen, Einleitung and passim.* Something on the same subject in an article "A German View of the *Sola Fides*," by F. Loofs, in the *Constructive Quarterly*, no. 1, 1913.

ure" on October 18, 1512. The date marks the beginning of his real study of the Bible, which from this time on was undoubtedly the most potent purely intellectual formative influence in his evolution. It is true that he knew the work before, for at his entrance into the cloister the monks had given him a Bible bound in red, and moreover the Constitution of Staupitz, adopted by the Order in 1504, prescribed diligent perusal of the Scriptures.¹⁸ But it was not until he became a doctor, sworn to defend and bound to teach God's Word, that he really applied himself to it and assimilated a portion of its contents.

Luther's exegesis is a subject that well might fill a volume, and yet a few words, inadequate as they must be, are necessary to explain it, for what a man gets out of the Bible always depends on his avenue of approach. Even in the sixteenth century it was noticed that this was the book in which everyone sought, and everyone found, his own dogmas.¹⁹ The work of the Wittenberg professor has been much studied but little clarified. Certainly, the unqualified depreciation meted out to it by scholars blinded by the far greater achievements of modern research does not seem to me just. No one, I should think, can read Luther's criticisms of the Epistle of James or that to the Hebrews, or of some of the historical parts of the Old Testament, without feeling that he had on occasion insight and acumen superior to any of his contemporaries, even Erasmus. His translation, too, is really remarkable, not only as a masterpiece of style, but as a scientific philological achievement. On the other hand, a very superficial acquaintance with Luther's method is sufficient to show that his spirit was anything but scientific; that he was far less objective and open-minded than was Erasmus.

Few works of Biblical scholarship show a more hopeless lack of historical feeling and a greater waste of effort on a totally fruitless method than the first lectures on the Psalms, presently to be described. The subject is too large to be treated here as it deserves, but the key to this strange puzzle, this odd mixture

¹⁸ T. Kolde: *Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation*, 22. This provision was later repealed, probably as a consequence of Luther's example.

¹⁹ *Hic liber est in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque,
Invenit inque illo dogmata quisque sua.*

of fine work and labyrinthine bewilderment, must at least be offered. The answer to the problem is found in the professor's dogma. The supreme interest with him was the establishment, or elucidation, of a preconceived body of ideas, the doctrine of the Church which he adopted so strictly, and which, even in his later days of rebellion against the hierarchy, he did so little to change. This interest was with him decisive. Any exegesis, no matter how far-fetched, any treatment of the text, no matter how violent, which harmonized with and supported the dogmatic system, was considered preferable to any alternative, however natural or reasonable, which seemed to contradict these ideas. This is why the method of Erasmus, in whom the dogmatic interest is at a minimum, and the impartial, critical attitude adopted, so promptly and decisively repelled him. But on the other hand, when his system allowed it, Luther was capable of achievement surpassing that of the humanists. In respect of his limitations it hardly becomes us to judge him too severely; the most famous Biblical scholars of the present show precisely similar tendencies. Not that either Luther or his successors consciously propose to themselves an apologetic method; rather they approach the Bible with the sincere wish to find out exactly what it has to say. It is only according to the psychological law of apperception that they see in the Bible that which they are told is there. The mind can only assimilate that for which it is in some degree prepared. It must be acknowledged, however, that Luther carried his dogma into his exegesis more boldly than do most scholars. He had the courage of his convictions. Thus he altered a text²⁰ in translating, to make it agree more nearly with the idea which he was convinced, on independent grounds, must be there. Thus also he rejected the Epistle of James because it contradicted his favorite idea of justification by faith; this, however, was much later than the period we are discussing. At that time he felt it incumbent on him to harmonize James and Paul, much as his followers have done since.

Luther's first lectures were on the Psalms; he then took up the Epistles to the Romans, Hebrews, and Galatians. It is significant that his so individual spirit was attracted to those por-

²⁰ Romans iii, 28. On this, my Luther, 267.

tions of the Bible which are, in either Testament, the supreme expression of personal religion. The dirges and paeans of the Psalmist, the temptations and fightings of the Apostle, struck in his troubled heart a chord deeper than that sounded by the Gospels; for the hero of the Gospels was on such a plane of God-like impeccability that he seemed unable perfectly to sympathize with frail humanity. Luther sought Christ in the Scriptures; indeed he sought him alone, but it was Paul's Christ, the Crucified, whose death and resurrection, rather than whose life, made reconciliation of man and God. All the Scriptures, he thought, spoke of Christ, and he therefore made them speak of him by allegory, if they did not do so directly. His later opinion, that he at first allegorized too much, will certainly be shared by most of his modern readers. Turning over his lectures on the Psalms (1513-16) we see that he found in almost every one some prophecy of Jesus, his birth or life or passion, including specific references to Pilate and Judas. From the modern standpoint it is impossible to imagine a worse method than his. He not only adopted from Lyra the fourfold interpretation of every text, historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical, but he improved on it by multiplying it by two; each of the said interpretations being understood in a double sense, the literal and the spiritual. The latter, which dealt with Christ or the Church, was the truer sense, the meaning which gives life while the letter killeth; the sense, in short, which made the true theologian. Anything can be deduced from any text by this method. It is of course hopeless to look for light on the original from Luther's lucubrations on the Psalms. The work on Romans (1515-16) is better, simply because it suited the professor's ideas to take Paul more literally. The Apostle really did speak of Christ, and there is therefore some hope of getting an objective inquiry into his exact meaning. But even here Luther did not at this time get very far; he really read his own ideas into Paul. Having learned from Erasmus and Lefèvre the trick of linguistic criticism, he seemed to make a sincere effort to get the original meaning of the words, but his research seldom went deeper into the context. Every sentence was treated as a premise, from which was deduced, by rigid Aristotelian syllogism, some truth of practical bearing on the question of salvation.

For our present purpose this subjectivity is an advantage; the less of the Psalmist and of Paul, the more of Luther. Read with this only in mind, the first lectures give a pretty accurate account of the road travelled by the Reformer during the years 1513-16. One of the most striking things in them is Luther's large and growing interest in public affairs—the evils in the Church, the tyranny of the princes, the disorders in the monasteries, the faults in the universities. These passages serve to remind us that their writer was rising to a responsible position in the university and in the Order, and that he was already a reformer; but as they have no direct bearing on our particular subject, which is the evolution of the doctrine of justification by faith, they may be safely disregarded for the present.

In the first lectures (1513-15) he has already arrived at a fairly advanced position. He no longer lays the whole emphasis upon works, as he apparently did in the first monastic years, but on the other hand he has not yet arrived at the *sola fides*. Faith without works is dead; a little later, faith is shown by works. The will is still considered free, though largely dependent on grace, but God is thought to give grace infallibly to one who did the best in his power. Indeed, God wants us to co-operate with him in working out our own salvation. Good works are therefore not to be disparaged, for they inevitably proceed from one who has been made just (justified).²¹ In pondering the question of his own salvation, Luther is also wavering; he neither despairs of it, as previously, nor postulates it, as later. He relies only on God's mercy, which is our only righteousness;²² he appreciates God's pity because he knows that he deserves nothing but evil;²³ he shuns blasphemy more than hell, striving to glorify the God who damns him.²⁴ Indeed, he even takes comfort in the thought that it is a sign of goodness to believe that one is reprobate, for none but those who know that they are most perfect can be free from this dread.²⁵

These passages point to the ultimate predestinarian and solifidian doctrines of the lecturer, but they do not actually formulate

²¹ Werke, Weimar, iv, 113 (1515).

²² Ibid. 343 (1513-14), 496 (1514).

²³ Ibid. iv, 131 (1515).

²⁴ Ibid. iii, 73 (1513-14).

²⁵ Ibid. i, 41. Sermon of December 27, 1514 or 1515?

them. Faith, he saw, was needed, but how was it to be got, and what was it? How, in short,—for this was the secret thought hardly acknowledged to himself,—could a man have faith in a God who still seemed to him unjust? The answer was suggested by the German mystics, Tauler and one of his school, the so-called Frankforter, whose anonymous manuscript Luther himself first printed under the title *A German Theology*. Just as he was beginning to lecture on Romans, thus becoming more deeply involved than ever in the awful mysteries of predestination and redemption, these men came into his life to tell him, what they felt as few men have ever felt, that the essence of religion is the union of the soul with God, and that this is achieved only by complete abandonment to his will. With the glow of intense conviction Tauler urges the need of ever greater self-denial and of ever completer surrender, until, without the interposition of any external institution, the soul eventually finds herself at one with her bridegroom.²⁶ So little emphasis is put on the usual ecclesiastical works, that Tauler esteemed the holiest man he ever saw one who had never heard five sermons in his life. He tells of a woman ready to be damned for the glory of God.²⁷ “And if such a person were dragged into the bottom of hell, there would be the kingdom of God and eternal bliss in hell.” In like manner the *German Theology* preached, “Put off thine own will, and there will be no hell.”

The bearing of this on faith came to Luther as the answer to the problem he had been meditating day and night for many years. It came to him suddenly, with apparent casualness, as the answer to so many questions comes to us all; the attention hovering around a desiderated thought and dwelling on all known associations with it, until, as it were spontaneously, the new idea, so long wanted, surges up into consciousness. The subconscious self is regarded by William James as the particular seat of the religious impulses, in which a concept may be long maturing, until, sometimes at the end of a protracted struggle, it comes into the stream of consciousness. Now, as we have seen, Luther had

²⁶ This simile made a particularly strong impression on Staupitz, who worked it out in his *Libellus de executione eternae predestinationis* (1515) with a realism revolting to modern taste. See Staupitzens Werke, ed. Knaake, i, 137 ff.

²⁷ Luther was doubtless thinking of this in his Ninety-five Theses, nos. 29, 40.

almost arrived at the conception of redemption by faith when he began to lecture on Romans, in May, 1515. It was apparently soon after this time²⁸ that the fully formulated idea (with certain corollaries presently to be discussed) dawned upon him with such force that it seemed a direct revelation of the Holy Ghost, opening the door to paradise. It is strange, and yet certain, that this revelation was vouchsafed to him in the privy of the Black Cloister, situated in the little tower overlooking the town walls. One is tempted to connect this fact with the monk's neurosis, referring to parallel cases of obsession driving people to go through certain ceremonies at stated times, often ceremonies of a quasi-religious nature at times least natural for them. It is simpler, however, to recollect only that Luther was a busy man, with little leisure for private meditation, and that the rule enjoined spiritual reflection at these times.²⁹ In telling the story of the monk who prayed while sitting on the stool, and had a controversy with the devil about the propriety of so doing,³⁰ Luther probably referred to his own practice. It must naturally have seemed odd to him at the time, however, that such a revelation should come on such an occasion, and thinking over the reason, he symbolized it:³¹

²⁸ Luther's references to it are so frequent and specific that it is impossible to believe that there was really no crisis at all, as is apparently the opinion of McGiffert, who does not speak of it in his Luther. The dating is more difficult, and is placed in various years from 1508 to 1519 by H. Böhmer, O. Scheel, G. Kawerau, Loofs (*Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1911, 461 ff.), and H. Grisar. I place it in 1515 or early in 1516 chiefly because the thought seems to me lacking in the writings of or earlier than 1515, but fully developed in the letters of 1516 (Enders, i, 28 ff. et saepe), and in other writings of this year, e.g. the *Quaestio de viribus* (Werke, Weimar, i, 142). Luther himself places it between his two courses on Psalms (1516-18, Scheel: *Dokumente*, 17), and says that it came to him while lecturing on Romans. *Tischreden*, Weimar, i, 335. Further he says the crisis came when he was "over thirty." Werke, Erlangen, xlv, 78.

²⁹ A. V. Müller: *Luthers theologische Quellen*, 221.

³⁰ *Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, i, 434.

³¹ Werke, Weimar, iv, 448. In 1516. My dating of the lectures is based on a system of interpolation; the lectures on Psalms being assumed to have lasted from November, 1513, to October, 1516; those on Romans from May, 1515, to October, 1516. The dating, which I have worked out in great detail, is remarkably supported by parallels, but, even if not quite accurate, it is obvious that when the limits of a course are known, the first lectures must fall near the beginning, the last near the end of the term.

the greatest triumphs of the spirit are in the vile substance of the flesh, which is regarded by the spiritual man, and is stated literally to be, in a manner, a *latrina* and *cloaca*. Conversely, therefore, the *cloaca* might stand for the flesh, in which the message of the spirit was revealed.

Analyzing the content of this experience, we find that it was not, "The just shall live by faith," or any such words. No; this was but the later formulation of an idea totally different when felt. Here, as so often, theology or philosophy but furnished the formula into which a great experience was forced, and thereby cramped and distorted; for words are still so large a part of thought that when once a certain set of them is adopted, it modifies and alters the original conception. What relation does the definition of the word "love" in the dictionary have to the wild heart-throb of passion? But the dogmatic shell of the *sola fides* was, if possible, even farther from the empirical concept which gave it rise, for it did not even approach that experience as closely as language allows; it was not, in short, the primary form in which Luther described his message. The antithesis, faith *versus* works, has become so natural to most students of the Reformation that they forget there is absolutely nothing necessary about it. The natural opposite of "work" is "do nothing," and *this* was the whole essence of Luther's message. Pure passivity on the part of man is the only way to court the grace of God. The strong man, who was never weary of the battle and of striving, was weary of defeat. He had been trying, trying, trying to work out his own salvation—for he had believed this possible—by ridding himself of sin and lust, but all to no avail. He gave it up as a bad job, cried, "Lord, damn or save!" and found peace. The sudden relaxation of the over-tense mind is in itself enough to bring it rest. The battle is not to the strong but to him who can yield himself most perfectly into God's hands.

The lectures on Romans are full of this idea; they grow eloquent to the point of passion when they treat of the mastering thesis. Paul's purpose in the whole letter, according to his exegete, is to destroy all one's own righteousness and wisdom, to show man his sins and folly and his deep need of Christ as his justification.

In fact, the more we seek salvation, the more God gives damnation. What, then, can we do to be saved? All we can do is to yield ourselves up with perfect resignation into God's hands, holding the soul as passive as a woman at conception,³² who by no effort of her own is impregnated with the grace of her bridegroom. To express his idea, he invented the phrase "passive righteousness of God," meaning thereby the righteousness of God which he puts in or imputes to man without any merit or even effort of the latter. The word has naturally puzzled many scholars, even the thorough Köstlin, who knew it only in the Reformer's later reminiscence. According to this, the crux of the whole matter was to fathom the mystery of how God's righteousness could justify man, for by righteousness of God (*justitia Dei*) Luther had always understood "the formal or active justice of God, by which he is just and punishes sinners"; but in the revelation he is describing it came to him that by it the Apostle rather meant "the passive justice of God, by which he mercifully justifies us through faith." These words are indeed obscure as they stand, but they are amply elucidated by reference to the *Commentary on Romans*. There we read that the passivity is to be understood of man, who thus and only thus acquires God's grace. Another image to bring this truth home is that of the axe in the hands of the woodman and of the rod in the hand of a man chastising a dog. Neither the axe nor the rod can do aught of itself, but only the master. Now this "passive and active justification" is the same as believing in God, and the power to do even this is also his special gift. Again faith is defined as not merely believing in him—the writer's former position—but believing him to be just, for it is only his justice that makes us just. Consequently, "faith is justifying grace," and faith in Christ takes away the consciousness of sin.

The corollaries of this passivity, which, because it was so hard, was interpreted as the highest mark of faith, were drawn with strict logic. "Where now is our righteousness? Where are good works? Where are the freedom of the will and chance?" The will has no power to justification, but only to sin. Where God

³² Römerbrief, Scholien, 206. This comparison of the soul to the bride of Christ was not of course original with Luther. It was the favorite simile of the monks.

does everything, man can do nothing; therefore his will is in bondage. This dogma, in fact, is but the reverse of the medal of which the doctrine of faith only is the obverse. That it makes God the cause of man's sin and damnation is frankly recognized, though it is stated that, as all belongs to him, he has a right to do as he will with his own. The doctrine is put very strongly, for God is conceived as dealing out redemption and reprobation with total disregard of the merits and demerits of individuals. As this idea, to our notions so irrational and mean, became widely prevalent among Protestants, it must be assumed to have had in it something suited to the mental constitution of the time. What this was, however, is hard to say. It can certainly not be explained on the overworked maxim that man makes God in his own image, for a capricious and tyrannical God was repugnant to the natural feelings of the Reformer. It was only by a supreme effort of faith that he could persuade himself that a Deity apparently so cruel and iniquitous could be merciful and just. The thesis of this article is that Luther's beliefs were deduced from his experiences, and yet it must be recognized that this key is too simple to fit all locks. Some of his beliefs were apparently but the logical deductions of others, although the corollaries occasionally ran counter to the emotions which prompted the primary propositions.

Another deduction from the main premise, and one which he was obliged to modify in practice, was the total worthlessness of good deeds, even those of ordinary morality. This in fact was the antinomianism with which the *sola fides* is often charged, and which, in fact, it often produced. The position he held in 1516 is more cautious than it occasionally was later, but it is sufficiently pronounced. Venial sins are thought not to prevent a man inheriting eternal life, and good works do not help him to it. Good works without grace are like the actions of a monkey imitating a man, but unable thereby to make himself one. Grace, and grace alone, is necessary. The negative side of the same teaching is cast into the form of caustic sarcasms against the "*justitiani*" who rely on their own endeavors. Their righteousness is no righteousness, for man has none save that which is imputed to him by God. A man may be perfectly good (*rectus*)

without being in the least justified (*justus*). In short, the heroic virtues of Fabricius and Regulus no more savor of redemption than do sorb-apples of figs.³³

The final corollary of the great message was: Certainty of salvation. "*The elect are saved not contingently but necessarily.*"³⁴ These words, thus underlined by Luther, indicate the last stage in the development of his system, for they brought him the assurance of comfort and hope. He dwells on the concept at length and frequently. He never forgets that the new hope came to him through despair, that to win heaven a man must be resigned to hell.

This great experience was the beginning of the career of the Reformer. It was the corner-stone of his life and doctrine. The effect was almost instantaneous. "It is mine," said he, with superb self-confidence, shortly after, "to point out whatever I may see that is not right, even in high places." It was this feeling which made him thoroughly purge his university of the dross of Aristotelian ethics. It was this hatred of good works that necessitated the momentous protest against indulgences, and it was the comfort brought by the idea of faith and salvation that nerved its champion in the hard battle until the victory was won.

Once enunciated, the doctrine spread rapidly; faith as a grain of mustard-seed waxed a great tree; the morsel of yeast leavened the whole lump. In the secular twentieth century it requires a slight effort of the imagination to realize what enthusiasm a purely religious idea might arouse in the sixteenth. That it did so is certain; undoubtedly because multitudes were sick of the holiness of works offered them by the Church, and longed for a more spiritual religion. Admitting that the antithesis has often been exaggerated and stated, both by Luther and his followers,

³³ Enders, i, 64. October 19, 1516. This is of course from Augustine, recalling the saying attributed to him, that the virtues of the heathen were but splendid vices. Cf. also Römerbrief, Scholien, 323.

³⁴ Römerbrief, Scholien, 208. It may be of interest to note that at the Council of Trent, twenty-one theologians were for "*certitudo gratiae*," fourteen against it, and two silent. A. V. Müller, *op. cit.*, 219. But the doctrine was rejected. Pastor: History of the Popes, xii, 345.

with gross unfairness,³⁵ nevertheless the popular idea remains roughly right, that the Reformation meant a movement from a mechanical to an individual and subjective conception of religion. It was the same need of doing away with externals and seeking an immediate relation to God that moved the mystics of the fourteenth century; but Europe was not then ripe for the idea. The explanation of Luther's success where Tauler failed is partly found in the timely elements with which he combined his original thought. His own experience was but the nucleus around which was gathered all that was most vital in the thought of the age—the return to the Bible, to Augustine and to mysticism, the protest against the sophistries of the schoolmen and against the corruption of the Church, and a simpler, more individual relation of the soul to God. Above all, Martin Luther was fitted to be the prophet of his age because he had the most searching experience in what that age imperiously demanded, personal religion.

³⁵ Luther says that the papists believed "*Der Munch-Dreck besser quam fides.*" *Werke*, Weimar, xlv, 296.